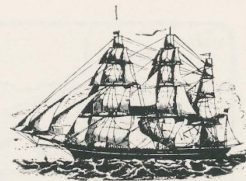


# SEA LETTER

Published by the San Francisco Maritime Museum

ALBERT W. GATOV, *President*    KARL KORTUM, *Director*



Volume 3, No. 1, May, 1965

ANITA VENTURA, *Editor*



*The SS CORONA of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company at Long Wharf, Santa Monica, c. 1895.  
Photograph by Henry E. West, courtesy of Robert A. Weinstein.*

## Coastwise on the CORONA

### San Francisco to San Pedro, 1901

BY HOWARD T. LIVINGSTON

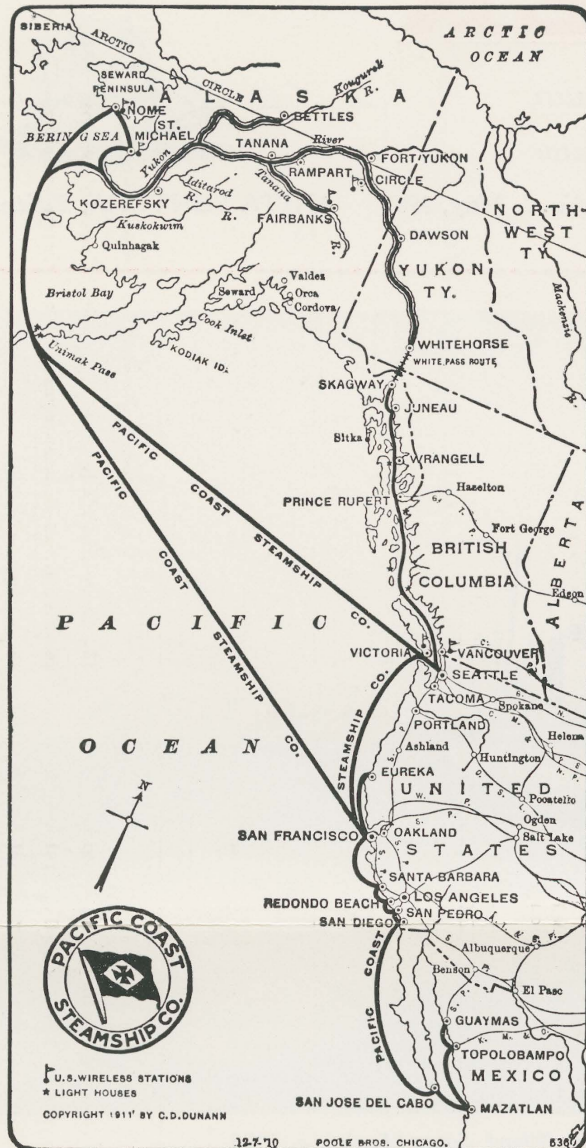
*The author has been for some time a prolific correspondent of the Maritime Museum's, and has generously put into our hands a number of his manuscripts. This reminiscence was among the first, and the ones that followed, on other coastal voyages and on the waterfront scenes of the early days of this century, are of similar quality. An engineer who was employed by such firms as Fulton Iron Works, Moore and Scott Shipyard and Mare Island Navy Yard, Mr. Livingston was retired in 1959 from the Los Angeles County Engineering Department. This trip from San Francisco to San Pedro in 1901 was his first from San Francisco, to which his family returned in 1905. He presently resides in Portland, Oregon.—A. V.*

The CORONA was scheduled to sail from Broadway Wharf (Pier 11) at 9 A.M. on a Friday morning early in April 1901. At 9 A.M., however, freight was still piled high on the deck, and it was two hours before loading was completed.

The CORONA was a coasting steamship that made a round trip each week between San Francisco and Newport, in Orange County, stopping at a number of ports en route each way. While small, she was well kept-up. The passenger quarters were spotlessly clean, and she was very comfortable to travel on. Her master, Captain Gielow, a hot-tempered and energetic man with red hair and a red moustache, backed up by an equally energetic first mate, saw to it that every part of the ship was maintained in proper seagoing condition.

In the year 1900, my father's employer, the California Construction Company, was awarded the contract to build the San Pedro breakwater. He was appointed superintendent in charge of construction, and also of the quarries at Declez, near Colton, from which the granite used was obtained. As this job was to last for a number of years, early in 1901





*Routes of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company, from a 1910 brochure.*

my father arranged for his family, consisting of my mother and the six children, to move to San Pedro and make that city our home.

My parents decided on a sea voyage as being much preferable to traveling by rail, which in those days required 22 hours from San Francisco to Los Angeles by the San Joaquin Valley route of the Southern Pacific Railroad, and then a change of trains to the local to San Pedro. As the CORONA was scheduled to dock at San Pedro each Sunday forenoon, it promised a much more comfortable and pleasant mode of travel, and a more convenient time to arrive at San Pedro.

When word circulated around the neighborhood that we were about to leave San Francisco, friends began dropping in to make farewell calls. While none of these people had ever been on the ocean, the general topics of conversation were the miseries of sea voyages in general, the certainty that we would all be seasick, and the agreement that it was an ordeal to be looked to with dread.

Now for some mysterious reason, in the opinion of these same persons there was an additional ordeal to go through

in leaving San Francisco by sea, and that was crossing the bar at the entrance to the harbor. The conversation would no sooner be started than we would hear, "But you will have a terrible time crossing the bar." According to what we were told, crossing the bar by ship was the equivalent of being inside a concrete mixer in operation. However, these stories failed to terrorize a boy not yet twelve years of age, whose favorite books were about the adventures of seafaring men, and whose own ambitions were to some day go to sea.

Sailing morning found us aboard well in advance of the scheduled sailing time. In those days, however, sailing schedules were not strictly observed. The business of the steamship company was primarily hauling freight, and the ships remained at the dock until the last slingload was aboard. The passengers knew of and accepted this system as a matter of course. Those who enjoyed traveling had a longer voyage, with a few extra meals. Therefore, the delay in sailing caused us no annoyance, and the several hours between boarding and sailing passed quickly and pleasantly. The work of loading a ship is always interesting. The next dock to the north of us was the berthing place for the Red Stack fleet of tugboats, also a busy place. And there were the movements of ferryboats and the various maritime activities of San Francisco Bay to watch. Finally, loading was completed, and the CORONA headed for sea. It was a beautiful day; one on which San Francisco Bay was in one of its most attractive moods—bright and sunny, warm, and with very little wind.

After passing Fort Point, I began looking for the terrible bar. As far as I could see in all directions the ocean's surface was only slightly ruffled, and most of the ship's motion was caused by an easy ground swell rolling in from offshore. The ship was pitching slightly, with a slow, easy motion. After the ship had passed Seal Rocks and was on its way southward along the coast, I asked the mate, who came along at that moment, about the bar. When he had heard my story, the mate explained that the ship had passed out through the South Channel, and that it hadn't crossed the bar at all. Even had we crossed it, he said, it would not have been rougher than anywhere else, since the weather was fine. Actually, except for a short windy spell while rounding Point Conception, the entire trip could have been made in perfect safety in a rowboat. The weather was clear, and it was pleasant to be out on deck. Our stateroom was on the port side of the ship, and opened out onto the upper deck. Because of the ship's numerous stops, she was never very far offshore, so we had an excellent view of the coast.

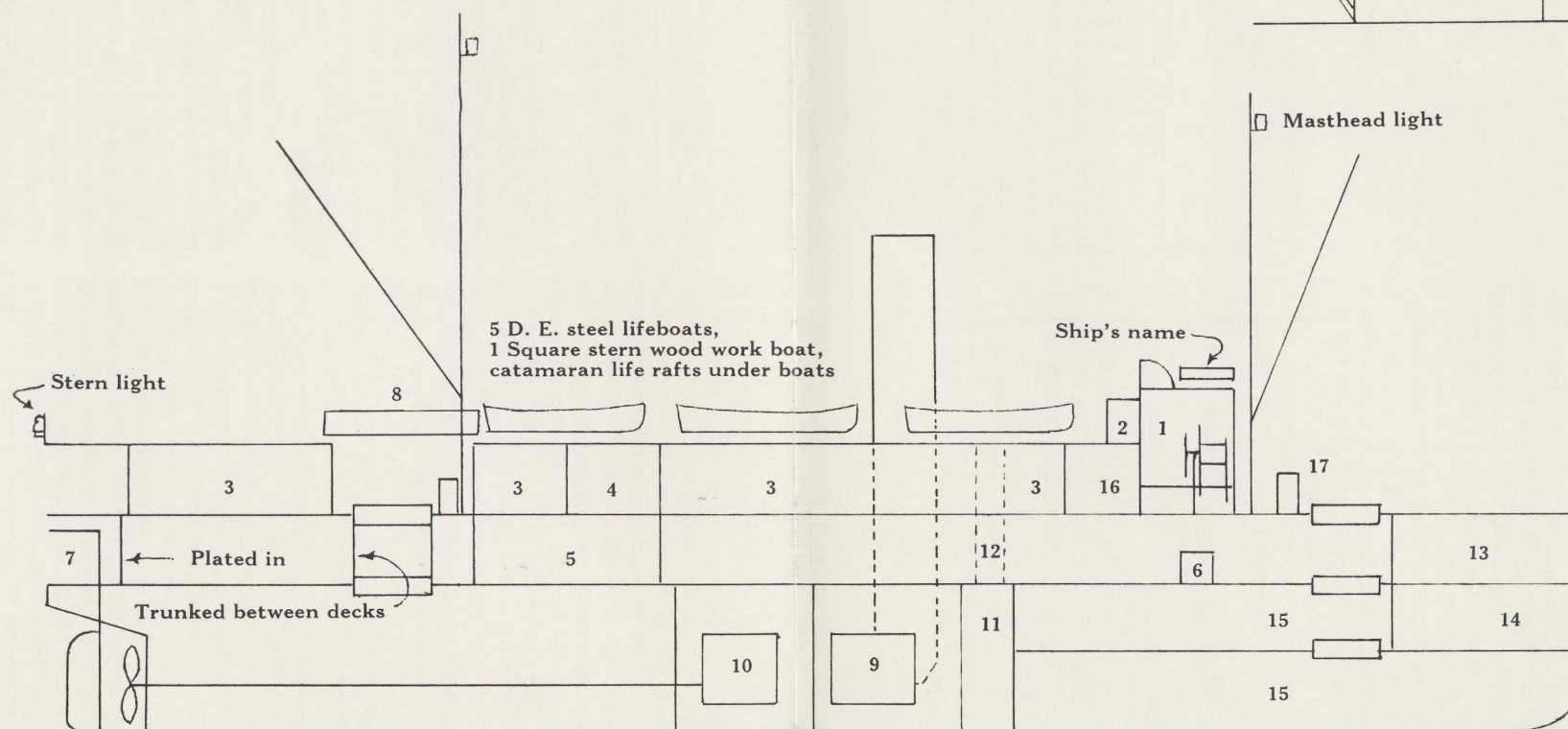
The first-class passenger staterooms were in a deckhouse on the upper deck, and as each room opened directly onto the deck, they were called "outside staterooms." The interior finish was tongue-and-groove, painted white. The fore-and-aft length of each room was six feet. On the inside bulkhead were three built-in bunks, extending between the forward and after bulkheads. On the forward bulkhead was a wash basin, above it a small water tank and two water bottles in a rack. The basin drained into a bucket. At intervals, a steward replenished the water tank and bottles, and emptied the drain bucket. There was no running water in the passenger quarters, except in the washrooms. Near the head of each bed, on a bracket, there was a receptacle popularly known as "the strawberry pot." This was for the benefit of seasick passengers, and was promptly put out of sight by those not subject to this malady. On the after bulkhead there was a built-in seat, with a locker underneath.

At noon a steward announced lunch by walking around



## SS CORONA

Built in Philadelphia by Neafie & Levy, 1888, for the Oregon Improvement Company. Length B.P. 220.7, Beam mld. 35.2, Depth mld. to main deck 15.7, Draft, summer load line 12.3, U.S. tonnage gross 1,492, net 966, speed 12 knots. Single-screw, triple-expansion engine. Cylinders 20", 31" and 51" by 36" stroke. Two S.E. Scotch boilers, coal burning, electric light, steam steering gear. Accommodations for 162 passengers and 53 crew. CORONA served Pacific Coast from 1897 to 1907, when she went ashore at the entrance to Eureka harbor. The vessel and cargo were a total loss, but all passengers, baggage and crew were saved.



(From a drawing by the author.)

- |                |                    |                    |                 |                             |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Wheel house | 4. Social stall    | 7. Rudder quadrant | 10. Engine      | 13. Crew's fo'c's'le        | 16. Captain's room |
| 2. Bridge      | 5. Dining saloon   | 8. Movable bridge  | 11. Coal bunker | 14. Second class passengers | 17. Cargo winches  |
| 3. Staterooms  | 6. Steering engine | 9. Boilers         | 12. Coal chute  | 15. Cargo holds             |                    |



## Coastwise on CORONA, 1901

the first-class passengers' quarters ringing a triangle. This proved to be chapter two of a series of new experiences. The CORONA'S dining saloon was on the main deck, immediately abaft of the engine room. In accordance with a custom handed down from early days, there were two long tables running fore and aft. The captain sat at the head of the starboard table, with the chief engineer at the opposite end. The first officer presided at the port table, with the purser and freight clerk at the after end.

The interesting feature of the meal, to me, was having a steward hold a menu card before me, from which I was free to order anything I felt like having, or, if I had sufficient capacity, I could "go through the wagon," as it was called in those days. Later I learned that on ships that had the reputation of serving good food (being "good feeders"), it was the practice of the steward to prepare a certain minimum amount of food for each meal. Then if, as frequently happened, an appreciable percentage of the passengers were seasick, while some of the others had their appetites sharpened, the stewards were glad to see the ones capable eat heartily, so there would be no left-over food. Since the many ways of entertaining passengers that are taken as a matter of course on present-day ships were not known in those days, mealtimes were the only real social events of the voyage. It was the duty of the stewards to build up good-will between the passengers and the steamship line. For this reason, an elaborate menu, with many courses, was served, and mealtime was usually a long and enjoyable affair.

There were a number of customs on the CORONA that had been handed down from sailing ships. Although she was lighted by electricity, in each stateroom there was a small oil lamp on a wall bracket, and hung in gimbals so that it would maintain an upright position as the ship rolled. Alongside the lamp was a printed notice that all lamps were to be extinguished at 10 P.M., unless special permission was granted from the captain allowing a lamp to be burned later.

Another hangover from the sailing ship days was the steering gear, which was of the type called a "combination steam and hand gear." In the wheelhouse there was a large hand steering wheel with a wooden spool. A Manila rope was wound around this spool, secured to the spool at the center of the coil, with the two ends free. The free ends were shackled to two wire cables that led to a quadrant on the rudder post. To convert this to a steam gear, a sheave had been bolted onto the hand wheel, and a second Manila rope led around this sheave and to a steam steering engine on the deck below. The steam engine was controlled by a small hand wheel aft of the big wheel. The idea was that in case of trouble with the steering engine, the rope would be pried off the sheave and the ship steered by hand.

In the early afternoon, the first stop of our voyage was made at Santa Cruz. The tide was low, and the water was too shallow to allow the ship to dock. There were six small boats carried on the boat deck, one of which, a ship's wooden yawl boat, was used as a workboat. The women passengers landing at Santa Cruz were loaded into this, and the boat was lowered. The men passengers then climbed down a Jacob's ladder to the boat, and when all going ashore were aboard, the boat was rowed to the dock. From the large number of people on the wharf, we realized that the arrival of the ship at Santa Cruz was an event for which a good proportion of the town's population turned out. This was also true at the other little coastal towns at which the CORONA stopped.

At these small ports, except for San Pedro, longshoremen



### PACIFIC COAST STEAMSHIP COMPANY

#### DINNER

##### BLUE POINTS

QUEEN OLIVES	CELERY	MIXED PICKLES
MULLAGATAWNY	CONSOMME IMPERIAL	
BOILED FRESH FISH, HOLLANDAISE SAUCE		
POTATOES AU NATURAL		
VEAL, CELERY SAUCE		
CHICKEN CROQUETTES, CREAM SAUCE	PEACH FRITTERS	
PRIME RIBS OF BEEF AU JUS		
LEG OF MUTTON WITH JELLY		
HAM, CHAMPAGNE SAUCE		
LETTUCE SALAD MAYONNAISE		
CAULIFLOWER	RICE	STEWED TOMATOES
ENGLISH PLUM PUDDING, HARD AND BRANDY SAUCE		
ASSORTED PASTRY AND PIES	PISTACHE ICE CREAM	
NUTS	FRUITS IN SEASON	RAISINS
AMERICAN, EDAM AND SWISS CHEESE		
TEA	COFFEE	CHOCOLATE

Any inattention or incivility on the part of an employee of the Steward's department should be immediately reported to the Purser. All complaints about the service in the dining room or in staterooms should be reported to the Chief Steward.

F 6-1 1. 10.23.1909, 5M

*Menu typical of the fare on Pacific Coast Line.  
Its vessels were noted as being "good feeders."*

were not available. Therefore, the CORONA carried a large crew of deckhands for working cargo. The absence of longshoremen was the origin of another custom. With no one on the dock to take the ship's lines, two deckhands were swung out from a cargo boom and lowered to the wharf, a hazardous procedure that has been discontinued.

As soon as the workboat that had taken the passengers to the dock returned and was hoisted aboard, the ship got under way and proceeded across the bay to Monterey, where she docked at about sunset. After an hour's stop at Monterey, the ship again got under way. There was no wind, but a heavy ground swell caused the ship to pitch noticeably, although it was with a slow, regular and even motion that was really pleasant to one who enjoys traveling by sea. This heavy ground swell is usually present off Monterey Bay, and was in fact more noticeable there to me than at any other point on the voyage.

When bedtime came, my mother sent me to the purser's office to ask if she could have some extra pillows. The purser told me to talk to "that man over there." "That man" turned out to be the second mate. The second mate directed me to a certain office, and there to ask for "Mr. Jimmy Jones," who turned out to be the freight clerk. The freight clerk, in turn, gave me some intricate directions on how to





*The SS SANTA ROSA, one of the Pacific Coast Line's larger vessels, at Redondo Beach, California. The man in the foreground has probably just disembarked. Photograph by F. H. Maude, courtesy of Robert A. Weinstein.*

reach a certain place on the deck below, which turned out to be the chief engineer's quarters. After hearing my story, the chief engineer decided that I had supplied enough fun for one night, so he told me to go back to our stateroom and press a button. A steward would then appear and provide whatever was needed.

At dark I became acquainted with another ship's custom, now also obsolete. The night watchman brought up the red and green side lights from the lamp room and hung them in place on the lamp boards. The lamp boards were wooden, and made like boxes with two sides and one end removed. On steamships, they were usually on the sides at the level of the boat deck. On sailing ships they were usually on the fore shrouds. On large sailing ships, instead of lamp boards, there were sometimes miniature lighthouses on the sides of the fo'c's'le head just forward of the fore rigging. This was to prevent their being masked by sails.

On the CORONA, these two lights were lighted by oil. Evidently electric lights were not trusted at certain points, yet both of the masthead lights and the stern light were electric. (On the other hand, the ROANOKE, another coastal steamship, carried electric side lights, but her captain insisted on an oil lantern for his foremast-head light.)

During the night, the CORONA stopped at San Simeon,

and at daybreak at Cayucos. At 9 A.M. the morning after leaving San Francisco, we docked at Port Harford, which was later renamed Port San Luis. This port was the sea terminus of the old South Pacific Coast Railway. As the ship was docking, a narrow-gauge locomotive with a diamond smokestack was pushing a train of flat cars, loaded with grain, onto the wharf. The BONITA was on the opposite side of the wharf. She backed away and started on her way northward just as the CORONA finished docking. She was a wooden steamship, smaller than the CORONA, and alternated with our vessel in maintaining a biweekly schedule.

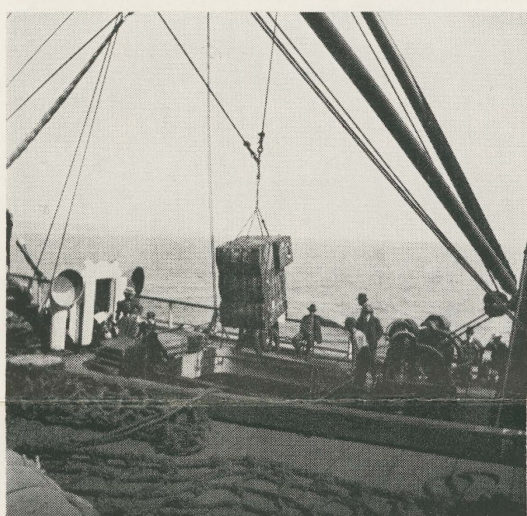
With a long spell of loading ahead of them, our captain and mates removed their coats and took personal charge, letting out a flow of language that delighted the men passengers, and kept the women passengers out of earshot. While directing the loading, the captain held a big hatchet in his hand, which we were unable to see how he could use in this situation.

When it was necessary to move a freight car, the captain and the first mate performed this operation by means of a line passed around a deck capstan. Deckhands were too valuable for tossing sacked grain to spare their time for moving cars. The mate offered to pay the men traveling





*Above, Main Channel, Inner Harbor, San Pedro. In the foreground is the towboat CATALINA; beyond is the three-mast schooner SADIE; and by the Terminal Railway Wharf is the SS BONITA, which alternated on the San Francisco-San Diego run with CORONA.*



*Left, the SS CORONA discharging at Port Los Angeles, c. 1903. The passengers on these vessels traveled on a schedule set by the problems of loading and unloading, for the primary business of the company was hauling freight. Sailings were often delayed by two hours, and arrivals by half a day, depending on loading and unloading conditions at the various small coastal ports. Photograph by F. H. Maude, courtesy of Robert A. Weinstein.*

*Right, Inner Harbor, San Pedro, from Terminal Island, c. 1904. The first SS HERMOSA is seen forward of the three-masted lumber schooner MILDRED. Moored across the channel are the steam schooners ALBION, SAMOA and ALCAZAR. The party in the small boat have probably rowed across the channel for a visit with friends aboard the schooner. Photograph by Charles Wood.*

second class to help in the loading. Although they were all working men on their way to jobs in Southern California, they refused the mate's offer—they had paid for their trip, and intended to enjoy it. Furthermore, if they worked, they would shorten the voyage as well. On the other hand, if the ship would refund their passage money entirely, they were willing to work freight at every port from San Luis to San Pedro. Meantime, they had a first-class observation gallery on the upper deck, and were deriving keen enjoyment from watching the deckhands work under the high pressure urging of the "Old Man" and the mates.

About 5 P.M., loading was completed. The CORONA backed clear of the dock, and then resumed her voyage southward. There was no wind, and the water was very smooth, almost without any ground swell. I sat out on deck forward and watched the coast, which gradually faded out in the darkness. Later, I watched the light on Point Arguello, and still later the one on Point Conception, gradually rise, apparently out of the ocean, as we approached them.

I had been told that during the evening we were to pass the QUEEN. She was another ship of the same company as the CORONA, but on a different schedule, as her ports of call were Santa Barbara, Port Los Angeles, Redondo, and San Diego. When I first sighted the QUEEN, she had not yet altered her course after passing Point Arguello, and I could see her two masthead lights. Evidently

her hull was hidden behind a low projection of the point; I could not see her green side light. Shortly after, she altered her course, and I saw her masthead lights come into line, while at the same time both her red and green side lights appeared. When she altered her course to pass us seaward, I could see only her green light. When the QUEEN'S lights first appeared, the boatswain was standing near me. Evidently he decided that it was his turn to have a little fun, and he said: "Do you see those lights?" When I answered yes, he said, "Those are the Farallone Islands." When he found that I was too wise for that one, he said: "I'll tell you what those lights are. That is the tomale man."

As they passed, the two ships made known their identities by a fireworks signal, a form of Roman candle that burned for a time with a pale green flame, and ended by shooting a number of colored balls skyward.

Shortly after we passed Point Conception, a high wind sprang up. During the night stops were made at Gaviota, Santa Barbara and Ventura.

When I turned out at 6 A.M. the next morning, the CORONA was approaching the wharf at Hueneme. The usual system of swinging two men onto the dock was tried, but the ship was too far out, and the men were suspended over the water. A group of men on the wharf formed a chain; the outermost grasped one of the deckhands by an





ankle, and they were pulled over the dock while the winchman lowered them down.

As I remember it, Hueneme, in 1901, consisted of a group of old-fashioned cottages and a lighthouse. We finished loading shortly after breakfast, and resumed our voyage. There was no wind, and the sea was smooth. It was cloudy, but clear under the clouds, so that there was no glare from the water, but wonderful visibility. This afforded me my first view of the Channel Islands. Directly to seaward was Anacapa, a low, rocky ridge, resembling a whale's back, and broken into three pieces. Farther out was Santa Barbara Island. As the morning passed, the clouds faded away and the sun came out. Gradually Palos Verdes rose out of the ocean ahead, while Santa Catalina Island appeared to the southwest as we crossed Santa Monica Bay and approached Point Vincente.

**W**e enjoyed our last meal afloat while crossing Santa Monica Bay. At the time we were passing through a fleet of fishing boats, and I became so interested in them that I was late to the table, and one of the last to leave. There was a large, boat-shaped dish of assorted cookies on the table, the kind that a boy likes to have free access to. As I was finishing my last course, the steward pushed the dish my way, giving me a long, solemn wink. I took the hint and left the table with my pockets stuffed. Two hours later, in San Pedro, I made friends fast with the CORONA'S cookies for calling cards.

On coming on deck after luncheon, I found that the CORONA was nearing Point Fermin. The breakwater trestle

was just coming into view. Rounding the end of the breakwater, the ship swung over toward the bell buoy in order to be far enough to the eastward to clear the bar at the entrance to the inner harbor.

On our left we had our first view of the little city of San Pedro, located on a table land that terminated in a vertical bluff. It was the lowest of a series of terraces that rose in successive steps to Palos Verdes, a tall, round-topped hill to the west that topped a headland which jutted out into the Pacific from the coast. After we had settled in San Pedro, it seemed odd to us to see the sun and the moon rise out of the ocean and set behind the hills to the west, just the opposite to what we had always known in San Francisco. (South of San Pedro, the land sweeps away to the east and the southeast.) These were days long before Los Angeles smog, and we had a clear view of the San Gabriel Mountains inland.

From the southeast corner of the San Pedro bluff ran the westerly of the two jetties that formed the entrance to the inner harbor. On the right, a long sand spit, named Terminal Island, formed the east side of the harbor. From the sea end of the island extended the east jetty; at the end of this was a light beacon. This jetty intersected Deadman's Island, which looked like a piece of the bluff that had been broken off and moved about a mile to sea. The CORONA'S course was altered to pass between the beacon and the black bar buoy, and then up the inner harbor to the Southern Pacific Railroad dock at the foot of 9th Street.



SAN FRANCISCO

# Maritime Museum

FOOT OF POLK STREET  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

Non-Profit  
Organization

U. S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
San Francisco, Calif.  
Permit No. 7496

## SEA LETTER

*SEA LETTER is sent quarterly to members of the San Francisco Maritime Museum, a private non-profit historical society. The museum is supported almost entirely by its three-masted Ship BALCLUTHA at Pier 43 and by its members. Interested non-members are cordially invited to join the museum to help support its program of the preservation and display of Pacific Coast maritime history.*

RETURN GUARANTEED

### Coastwise on CORONA, 1901

The CORONA usually docked at San Pedro at about 8 A.M. on Sundays. She had left San Francisco two hours late, and the heavy load of grain that she had taken on at Port Harford had added a few hours more. (In fact, when there were heavy shipments of grain, sometimes the two ships on the San Diego run made an additional stop at Port Harford, which lengthened their schedule by several hours.) So it was 2 P.M. before we docked, and the people who spent Sunday afternoons in the park overlooking the inner harbor adjourned to the wharf to watch the operation.

They made a large and critical audience for the docking of the CORONA. There were a large number of deepwater men who had settled down ashore, and they were close observers of whatever went on at the waterfront. It was well known there which ship captains made neat landings, and which did not. Captain Gielow of the CORONA and his crew were rated as among the best.

One of the deckhands in the mate's squad on the fo'c's'le head was particularly skillful in throwing a heaving line, and San Pedro was a special opportunity for him to put on a good show. In throwing a heaving line, the line was coiled, and half of the coil was held in each hand, with the weight on the end of the right half. If properly thrown, the weight would fly through the air like a sky rocket, while the line would neatly uncoil and follow it. The object was to throw the weight so that the line would completely uncoil and

the weight drop to the dock. Where there was a freight shed, the man throwing the line would aim for a closed door, and wait for the roar of approval from the crowd that would follow the loud crash of the weight against the door, if his aim was good.

This is what our deckhand did. Picking out a door on the freight shed that he knew would make a good sounding board, he rang up a bullseye with the weight at the end of the heaving line. The hearty yell of approval came from the watching crowd, which would have considered it very sloppy work if the weight fell short or the line did not uncoil neatly and snarled.

In those days it was one of the courtesies of the port for anyone on the dock to take the heaving line and put the bight of the line over the pile head, or to cast off when a ship was leaving. (In casting off, it was considered bad manners to let a line drop in the water.) It very much pleased our family to see that my father was the first one on shore to catch the heaving line and help to pull the spring line ashore. There followed the usual greetings and calls between us and those on shore while we waited for the gangplank to be rigged. The family greetings followed as soon as we were on the wharf.

Thus terminated my first sea voyage—this coastwise trip on the CORONA, which I have remembered for these 64 years with great pleasure.

*The SS CORONA at the Terminal Island Wharf of the Salt Lake Railway in Los Angeles.*

